



Winter / Spring 2015



On Call

Cop 2 Cop Provides Officers an Outlet of Compassion and Solutions

Roy Diaz knows about suicide.

He had seven friends who took their lives. Diaz himself was close to doing the same. In the 1980s, the former senior correction officer for the New Jersey Department of Corrections had gone through a divorce, suffering anxiety and falling into a depression.

"I had a gun in my mouth at one point," he said.

He soon realized the pain his kids would experience as a result of his actions and decided to put the gun down.

At the time, outside of friends and family, Diaz, 58, said he didn't have an outlet available.

"The perception was we (law enforcement professionals) were tough, and you were expected to 'suck it up' and not come across as weak," he said.



Supervisor Shelia Hobson and peer counselor Tom Baber discuss Cop 2 Cop, a hotline that law enforcement professionals can call to seek help with problems in their professional and personal lives.

Photo: Minhaj Hassan

Suicide among members of the law enforcement community has gained more focus in recent years. That's why when a 24-hour/seven-day-a week hotline was created where law enforcement professionals could discuss their professional and personal hardships, Diaz couldn't help but say it was "much needed." He became a counselor for the phone line six years ago.

"I wish I had a confidential resource like this back then," he said, recalling the time he went through a difficult period.

The hotline, Cop 2 Cop, was set up in 2000 and is based in a call center at Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care in Piscataway. Since then, the peer counseling phone service, which can be reached by dialing 1-866-COP-2COP, has received some 33,000 calls and helped avert 227 suicides, according to Shelia Hobson, Cop 2 Cop's supervisor and program training specialist. It is considered a national best practice in suicide prevention. About 10 percent of all calls received are directly related to suicide, Hobson said.

The program was made possible through legislation calling for the creation of a "Law Enforcement Officer Crisis Intervention Services" phone line. The law, among other things, stipulated that there be funding for mental health resources for police officers, correction officers and others in the law enforcement field.

Cop 2 Cop has an annual \$400,000 budget. The service is currently staffed by 13 paid peer counselors, some of whom are retired law enforcement officers – three are former correction officers. Others are former social workers. A few are both.

Each counselor makes several call backs to clients who've called previously, checking on their status. More times than not, the peer counselors issue referrals for therapists and social workers, among other professionals and programs. For example, there is a substance abuse treatment program available only to law enforcement personnel, known as Bottles and Badges.

Harry Ellifritz, director of the NJDOC's Correctional Staff Training Academy, said Cop 2 Cop counselors are compassionate and determined to help their fellow brothers and sisters resolve crises. The counselors receive training at the academy.

"They care a lot," he said. "They want to be able to intervene and stop something before it happens."

Cop 2 Cop officials believe the phone service has helped shed the stigma for law enforcement officers who wanted to seek help but ultimately didn't, for fear of coming across as weak, among other factors.

Throughout the years, Hobson said, law enforcement administrators have come to better appreciate the need to help officers handle stressors constructively. She added that keeping one's emotions and problems bottled up often can be counterproductive or worse.

Hobson, a former correction officer, said those in her former profession are considered "a high-risk group." Since 2003, 29 out of 77 suicides within the New Jersey's law enforcement community involved correction officers. She has a theory as to why that is the case.

"The stressors are different. As a cop, you arrest [suspects], take them to jail, and you're basically finished until the court date," she said. "In corrections, you see them eight to 16 hours a day."

Correction officers' jobs, she said, also have many dimensions.

"You take on a role as a teacher, sociology worker, spiritual counselor," said Hobson, who also worked for the Essex County Prosecutor's Office. "It's a varied role. You lead with your head and your heart."

The first time people call, the conversations tend to be lengthy, often lasting some 40 minutes. Follow-up calls, which are only made if the callers permit, generally are much shorter, lasting about 15 minutes.

Diaz was sitting one afternoon in his cubicle at the call center taking and making calls from clients. He's thoughtful and soft-spoken, possessing the sensitive ear that stressed callers expect when dialing up Cop 2 Cop.

He credits his time spent as a correction officer at East Jersey State Prison for helping him have productive discussions with callers.

"In the jail, you don't have a gun. You don't have protective gear. You have to rely on your common sense and have strong listening skills," Diaz said. "That comes in handy [as a peer counselor]. The jails are very stressful environments. You're surrounded by convicted felons."

Over time, Diaz said a bond develops between him and the clients, made possible through regular callbacks.

"I get to the point where I say we've been friends for a long time," he said. "They say I always call at the right time, and they appreciate that. When I get that feedback, that makes me feel very good."

When asked what kinds of calls he receives, he said it runs the gamut. He couldn't get specific, citing confidentiality.

"It could be anything; marital issues, departmental issues," he said. "A lot of time, they're just venting to someone who's neutral. We're like Switzerland. We're just there to help them."

Other counselors noted that callers often contact them to simply clear their chests of some stressful situation, such as a marriage on the rocks, substance abuse or divorce.

"It is very rewarding," said Tom Baber, a peer counselor and a former Newark police sergeant. "A lot of them just need to talk. Everyone doesn't need counseling. We refer them if we feel they could use professional help."

Joe Orgo, a former Newark police detective, became a Cop 2 Cop peer counselor because he "wanted to give back."

"It has been nothing but uplifting and gratifying," he said, adding that he believes the stigma long associated with officers seeking help has steadily decreased. "There now is a sense you need to be proactive and receptive."

Bill Usery, a former police lieutenant in Bernardsville who also is a clinician, echoed his colleagues' sentiments.

"It's been wonderful. I enjoy the work," he said. "We save lives here."





Seeds of Inspiration

Winter / Spring 2015



Jones Farm Inmates Produce Spring Crops ... and Beautiful Plants

As spring approached, several men had stayed busy growing “cole crops” — lettuce, broccoli and kale, all crops that make up the mustard family.

Others had been sowing several seeds to grow a large variety of tomatoes. It is the beginning of the spring growing season, even if the inconsistent weather of late indicates otherwise. The seedlings are placed in trays called flats, which soon will be home to blooming plants.

The men are not involved in a horticultural program at a local nursery. They are inmates working at Jones Farm. In addition to their seasonal crop growing duties, they played a major role the past few months sprucing up various plants and flowers for the regional Oscars of the horticultural world: the Philadelphia Flower Show, which was held from February 28 to March 8.



Their green thumbs produced big-time results at the show. Twenty-one plants were entered into the competition. All together, the Jones Farm horticultural program won 19 ribbons. During the past seven years, Jones Farm plants have won some 100 ribbons at the prestigious show.

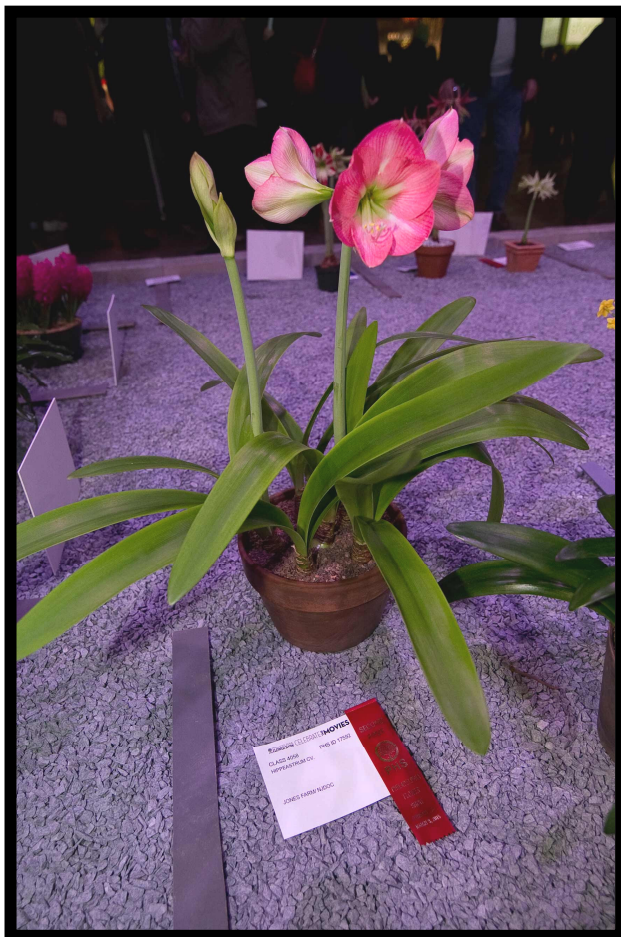
Inmates in the Jones Farm horticultural program spent many hours tending plants for the Philadelphia Flower Show. Their hard work produced 19 ribbons.

The person behind much of the program's success is its longtime teacher, Deborah Mahon, who brought the program to Jones Farm in 2008. Once having aspirations to study sociology or psychology, Mahon realized she already was imparting first-hand knowledge in those areas as a horticulturalist.

Inmate Michael Clennon said Mahon's personality certainly helps in keeping the program and the process focused and organized.

"She is the facilitator," he said. "She goes above and beyond, and it's because of those efforts, the passion she brings to it, that the program is cohesive."

The inmates worked diligently on the plants that were in the competition. One of the plants, the staghorn fern, won three ribbons. The plant, very common in rain forests, belongs to a class of plants known as epiphytes. These plants don't require soil, but mostly air for survival.



The amaryllis, a distinctive plant known for its red trumpet flowers, won three ribbons at the prestigious Philadelphia Flower Show.

Photo by Tim Galvelis

Mahon said beating out many other participants at the flower show, including professional florists, is gratifying for the participants in the horticultural program.

"The students are truly the ones that tend the plants, based on what they've learned in the program," Mahon emphasized. "I simply give them guidance. So, I am quite proud of the successful outcomes they have achieved."

She said the key to producing plants that will get recognized by the judges is to make them look better than "what someone would buy in a garden center." To help get them looking that good, the students read publications and learn about the latest plant fads. One of these publications, Green Scene magazine, is from the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society (PHS), which organizes the annual flower show.

Clennon, 31, was among many who had worked on the staghorn fern. Collectively, he and others spent 75 hours cleaning and pruning the plant. Tiny insects called mealy bugs were commonly found on the staghorn fern's leaves, known as fronds. Clennon said he used tweezers and soft bristle brushes to remove them.

"It's a unique plant," he said. "It's in the upper echelon for plant lovers."

Temperatures were among the many things everyone kept an eye on to make sure dramatic changes didn't stunt the plants' health. When the greenhouse gets excessively hot, shaded materials are installed to prevent further heat from entering. The ideal temperature range for many of the hothouse plants is between 55 and 60 degrees.

To get a jumpstart on growing the plants, participants use a cold frame, a contraption that is partially underground and contains see-through glass covers through which plants stored inside can receive sunlight. The heat trapped in a cold frame helps foster plant growth faster than normal, a process known as forcing.

One Jones Farm plant that was forced was the amaryllis. This plant has a large bulb and a tall stem. Its distinguishing features are four red trumpet flowers. The plant won three ribbons at the flower show.

Mahon said the plant was forced between September and February, which helped make it look very green.

Inmate Michael Bednarz, 38, helped clean and prune a rosemary plant. Like the staghorn fern, mealy bugs were among the most common problems affecting that plant. The cotton-looking insects tend to hatch their eggs on the leaves and even eat them. He felt a sense of accomplishment in preparing the plants for the flower show, ensuring they were in tip-top shape.

"I felt like I was part of the team, representing Jones Farm in a positive way," he said.

Bednarz added that programs like the horticultural program can "help steer men in a positive direction."

Clennon also endorses the horticultural program because it keeps him productive and disciplined. It also has exposed him to an industry he never thought he would find so fascinating.

"One of the most interesting things about the program is, I didn't think the amount of work keeping them green and pest-free was so large," he said.

He views his current circumstances as "turning a bad situation into a good situation."

Clennon added: "You can come in here and get an education and make money when you get out, rather than engage in a life of crime."

He hopes to land a job in the turf care industry after he's released.

Mahon believes prepping for the flower show taught the men valuable lessons: teamwork, goal-setting, meeting deadlines and producing the best products possible.

"They were stressed out at first about the intricacies," she said. "I was quite strict, but they did all the hands-on work.

"I have a strong personality," Mahon added. "They learn manners and respect, which I demand."





The Voice

Winter / Spring 2015



Correction Officer Recruit Delivers Memorable Version of National Anthem

It all started with a TV commercial some five years ago.

Kevin Santiago, 20, was home one day watching a Prego pasta sauce commercial featuring world-famous opera singer Luciano Pavarotti. He was, you could say, drawn to his stentorian voice.

"I started mimicking his voice," the correction officer recruit from Southern State Correctional Facility said.



COR Kevin Santiago

He was encouraged by teachers and others to not let that talent go to waste.

"People would tell me, 'Wow you have a good voice,' and that I should really pursue it," he related.

Santiago, who attended Vineland High School, was encouraged to take singing classes. He found himself in the strange position of traversing two different worlds, with one proverbial foot as a football player and the other as an aspiring singer. He admitted it felt a little strange, saying, "You were afraid of beating the status quo."

Still, he eventually got some of his teammates to take up singing.

Perhaps Santiago's most noteworthy accomplishment in this area was performing the National Anthem for some 150 colleagues and more than 1,000 guests at the Correctional Staff Training Academy, Class 231, graduation ceremony last June at the War Memorial in Trenton.

"I felt it was a huge honor to be up on stage," he said. "It was beautiful. The acoustics were great. It was special, being able to become a correction officer and to be able to sing. I love doing both."

Harry Ellifritz, director of the Training Academy, recalled that Santiago stood out from the participants in the audition, which was overseen by academy supervisors.

"He was just outstanding," Ellifritz said. "He had the voice and the talent."

In addition to his singing ability, Ellifritz said he was impressed with Santiago's determination. Initially, he thought Santiago might not complete the training to become a correction officer. However, Ellifritz noted, "he refused to give up. He fought and fought and worked hard. He had a lot of heart."

Ellifritz said it was uplifting for members of the graduating class to see one of their own perform on stage.

"It means more to the class," he said.

Santiago had initially wanted to become a music teacher or choir director and was pursuing a degree in music education at Rowan University in Glassboro. Yet he knew about the less-than-stellar economy and how difficult it was to find a good-paying job. Instead of "going into debt and then maybe finding a job," Santiago wanted a surer path to a job and good pay.

In hindsight, signing up to become a correction officer was, in many ways, his calling.

"It was always in the back of my mind," he said. "I looked at it as a good opportunity, as a steppingstone to a long career in law enforcement."

He said the academy prepared him well for managing challenging situations, which are not uncommon on a daily basis for correction officers.

"I love the job. I love working with the officers," he said. "I wouldn't mind being here for another 25 to 30 years."





Write On

Winter / Spring 2015



Longtime Correction Officer's Book Profiles African Americans in Bridgeton

When Bridgeton native Mike Santiago read a newspaper article chronicling the 325-year history of his home town, he was puzzled by the fact that only a half-dozen African Americans were cited.

"I figured that there had to be more than six African Americans worthy of mention," said Santiago, 52, a senior correction officer at Southern State Correctional Facility for more than two decades who retired February 1. "So I decided to do my own research."

That research ultimately produced "African American First in the City of Bridgeton, New Jersey," a 207-page book, published in 2014 by Truth Book Publishers, which tells the stories of nearly 100 Bridgeton residents, extending as far back as the mid-1800s.



Mike Santiago proudly displays his book "African American First in the City of Bridgeton, New Jersey."

"It was a blessing to see how the people I interviewed responded," said Santiago, who previously penned a trio of poetry books. "Everybody was so

excited to know that their experiences were being documented. They had no idea history was being made [through their actions]. They trusted God, believed in their dreams, and now their stories are being told.”

Santiago relied largely on word-of-mouth to conduct his research. He began by reaching out to some of the city’s most respected elders and utilizing the information he was given. As word of his project began to spread through the community, the number of referrals increased, and the possibility of turning his project into a book gradually became realistic.

“The whole process – knocking on doors, making more phone calls than I could count – was entirely new to me,” he related. “Yet, as I got deeper and deeper into my research, it began to occur to me that what I was doing had become a labor of love.”

Some of those profiled still are alive and residing in Bridgeton, while others achieved notoriety in the mid-1800s.

One page after Santiago lists the African American Civil War soldiers from Bridgeton, he introduces readers to Theophilus G. Steward, an African Methodist Episcopal minister, Army chaplain and historian, born in 1843, who assisted in the establishment of A.M.E. churches in South Carolina and Georgia.

Richard (Richie) Kates, Sr., who was born 110 years after Steward, was a world-ranked light-heavyweight in the 1970s and had title fights in both 1976 and 1977. Kates also was a longtime New Jersey Department of Corrections employee, having worked in a variety of capacities, including recreation supervisor and hearing officer, at Southern State and elsewhere.

The achievements of dozens who were born long after Steward and before Kates are highlighted. Charles Henry Borican, Sr., (1869-1964) was Bridgeton’s first African American mail carrier. Cornelius Mack (1905-1960) was the town’s first African American mortician. The first female county correction officer was Geraldine E. Butler (1931-present). Katherine Green Wilson (1916-1984) was the first African American teacher hired by the city’s school system. The first African American lawyer was Superior Court Judge Elliott G. Heard (1933-1991), who went on to become the first black jurist appointed to the bench in Gloucester County.

“In many cases, these were regular people,” Santiago said, “but they accomplished extraordinary things.”

John Borican compiled a staggering list of extraordinary accomplishments in his lifetime – a lifetime that, sadly, lasted only 29 years. A gifted athlete, he specialized in track and field. Although Borican sometimes competed while wearing borrowed footwear, he became the only man to win national decathlon and pentathlon titles in the same year (1941) and held six world records. Borican was featured in Life magazine, which called him America's greatest all-around track and field athlete. Furthermore, he was an accomplished artist – his work was published in books – who received a Master of Arts degree from Columbia University and was a Ph.D. candidate at the time of his death. Strangely, Santiago noted, Borican's death was largely ignored in the mainstream media.

"You can't appreciate history if you don't know about it," Santiago noted. "Now that all of these stories are in one place – in this book – anybody and everybody can read about what has been achieved."

Since the publication of the "African American First," Santiago has been honored by the Cumberland County NAACP, the Bridgeton African American Union and numerous churches. He also has become a sought-after speaker in and around Bridgeton.

In fact, the overwhelming response to his book helped to lay the groundwork for his next project.

"When I saw how much this book meant to so many people in my city, I decided to do the same thing for all of Cumberland County," Santiago said. "In doing so, my hope is that more and more young people are inspired and that they're encouraged to accomplish things that nobody else in their families or their communities has accomplished."





Something Special

Winter / Spring 2015



ADTC Sergeant Runs Events, Spreads Awareness about Special Olympics

Sgt. Beth Westrich considers Special Olympics athletes her “children.” It’s a bond she developed some 30 years ago, when she started working with them as a physical therapist. She helped them train for various games, including bocce, bowling and tennis.

When she left that profession to become part of the New Jersey Department of Corrections custody staff in 1999, Westrich, who works at the Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center (ADTC), was still able to maintain ties to the Special Olympics. Her dedication and strong leadership throughout the years, especially with the Law Enforcement Torch Run, have helped raise awareness — and funds — for Special Olympics New Jersey.



Sgt. Beth Westrich meets with medalists following the completion of a Special Olympics event.

She became the first female officer to have her name included on the Law Enforcement Torch Run Wall of Recognition at the Special Olympics New Jersey sports complex in Lawrenceville. Westrich received this honor at the

annual Special Olympics awards dinner, which took place last November at the Hilton in East Brunswick.

Westrich described the recognition as “shocking.”

“I was very humbled,” said Westrich, 51, a Monmouth County resident. “It was a wonderful dinner. It’s an honor to still be involved with Special Olympians and get to see them compete.”

The NJDOC and other law enforcement agencies help raise funds for Special Olympics through various events. The funds collected enable parents to enroll their kids in various Special Olympics events cost-free. New Jersey is one of four states where kids participate in the games at no cost, Westrich pointed out.

“We fund-raise 12 months a year,” she noted.

Westrich has competed in the Polar Bear Plunge, flag football and a series of runs in various parts of New Jersey. But the Torch Runs are among the biggest events. In last summer’s Torch Run, some 18 torches were lit in Trenton, with each torch representing a different group running in different parts of the state.

The leg of the run in which Westrich participated stretched from Island Beach State Park to Perth Amboy, an estimated distance of 60 miles. She and her teammates ran from one town to another, raising funds.

In addition, Westrich also competed in the National Torch Run, participating in the leg that stretched between New York City and North Jersey. That run lasted five days, with each runner covering about 15 miles a day.

“It was amazing,” she reported. “I competed with 20 people from 20 different organizations. We came together as strangers, and we left together as a family.”

In addition to raising awareness, Westrich also hopes people view the law enforcement community groups more positively by virtue of their participation.

“Not a lot of people are aware of the good work law enforcement does behind the scenes,” she said. “Public opinion seems to be on the decline. I’m

working hard every day to change that and to see the smiles on my athletes.”

Lt. Edward Sullivan, also of ADTC, considers Westrich a strong role model for the entire law enforcement community.

“Beth is definitely a leader in our community and in leading the Special Olympics program,” Sullivan complimented. “She is our diplomat in getting all the law enforcement agencies together for a good cause. It’s nice to see her get recognized.”

Westrich said it’s important to get kids involved in Special Olympics as soon as possible. Kids could start competing in games as young as age 4.

“If we get them involved at a young age, they do well in all aspects of life — socialization, coordination, motor skills,” she said, adding that she is inspired by the athletes. “They give me back tenfold, an abundance of joy and happiness.”

A training regimen also helps. Westrich said she generally wakes up at 3 a.m. and works out five or six times a week. She mixes her exercises, which include running, biking weight training and the elliptical machine. She started training on January 25 for a half-marathon, scheduled to take place in Asbury Park in April.

Another Polar Bear Plunge was held in Seaside on February 21. The event raised \$1.433 million, according to the Polar Bear Plunge Web site.

Westrich never tires of seeing the athletes in action, simultaneously displaying competitiveness and compassion for one another. She recalled how one runner slowed down for another participant to catch up with him before crossing the finish line.

“To see that camaraderie,” she said, “it just shows you how much they care for each other.”





Clean-up Crew

WINTER / SPRING 2015



This COBRA Makes Sure You Avoid Getting Harmed

The word COBRA may conjure up images of a slithering snake emitting poison. However, the COBRA that is part of the New Jersey Department of Corrections works to avoid exposure to harmful substances.



COBRA members wear chemical protective suits while checking a possibly hazardous substance.

Mysterious powders, spilled fuel or suspicious packages, COBRA members are trained to detect and prevent the spread of these and other hazardous substances. An acronym for Chemical Ordnance Biological Radiological Aid unit, COBRA is the most recent unit added to the Special Operations Group (SOG) of NJDOC.

Established in the fall of 2012, in response to concerns about the dangers that chemical and

hazardous substances could inflict on people and places, COBRA's primary responsibility is to serve as a decontamination unit, ensuring all NJDOC facilities are free of hazardous substances. In addition, it serves as a force multiplier for other agencies. The unit was on standby last year during Super Bowl XLVIII at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford.

"We have come a long way since the thought process," said Lt. Clay McClain, who oversees COBRA. "We've established the team's viability."

He said the unit has recently acquired victim mobility equipment, including stretchers and air monitoring devices.

Currently, there are 56 correction officers who, among their responsibilities at various institutions, serve on COBRA, split between three regions. Of the 56 officers, all of whom have their own gas masks and chemical protective suits, 12 officers are based in the south region, 23 in the central region and 21 in the north region. Each region has a trailer where the officers are based and where specialized equipment is stored.

Last year, COBRA responded to three incidents at three different locations. The first incident, in June 2014, was on a call of an unknown white substance found at South Woods State Prison in Bridgeton. Members used testing kits and determined the suspicious white substance was simply ground-up aspirin.



SCO Joseph Renzetti works the command post.

The second incident, which also occurred in June, involved a fuel leak from a 500-gallon tank at the Custody Recruitment Unit in New Lisbon.

Senior Correction Officer John McKay was one of the officers who reported to the fuel leak. The first thing he did was a "scene size-up," which involves checking the scene to determine if it's safe. McKay observed the leak was largely limited to an area directly underneath the tank. It was deemed safe to enter, since there were no open flames.

McKay and another officer stopped the leak with a plug and patch kit, which was in the HazMat trailer. Afterwards, a contractor was called to drain the tank. Also, HazMat booms - circular tubes made of various materials that are used to absorb spills - were set up to limit the spread of the gasoline, not letting it enter nearby grass or waterways.

"What I was thinking at the time was that there's a 500-gallon tank of diesel fuel I wanted to stop from leaking," he said.

In addition to rapid response, McKay said being part of COBRA has taught him the importance of being a good partner.

"The experience has been great," he said. "You learn about trust and teamwork. You need to be able to trust your partners, that they will make the right calls."

The third incident took place last August at East Jersey State Prison, where a staffer opened a letter and then reported to not be feeling well. COBRA members were sent to provide decontamination assistance. Nothing was found.

"Anytime you have a suspicious package, that would be a reason to contact us," McClain said.

New Jersey's location and facilities make it a potentially major target, having many factories, chemical plants and transportation centers. McClain said officials in the NJDOC believed something needed to be done to prevent threats.

According to McClain, there now is recognition that COBRA is well-equipped to handle dangerous situations. COBRA is now called upon whenever there are situations involving hazardous substances, McClain said.

"We're moving in the right direction" McClain acknowledged. "We're at a level now where we have the tools, where we've come a long way in two years."

He doesn't expect COBRA to replace local police or fire departments that would normally be contacted during an emergency. He just wants COBRA to also be called upon as "another layer."

"We want them (correction officials) to know there are members on staff they can tap into for their knowledge, who understand HazMat and understand the language," he said.


McClain said he's confident COBRA has been getting its due. He credited NJDOC Commissioner Gary Lanigan for being "forward-thinking" and helping to make COBRA "self-sufficient."

Regular drills and training sessions are held at various locations around the state, McClain added.

"The COBRA team gives the department the ability to respond and mitigate hazardous situations," said Major James Keil, who oversees SOG. "It's an excellent resource."

SOG, which is part of the department's Division of Operations, has been a full-time umbrella group for several specialized units since 2000, serving as NJDOC's tactical branch. In addition to COBRA, SOG is comprised of the Special Operations Response Team (SORT), the Canine Unit, the Correctional Emergency Response Team (CERT), the Enhanced Security Transportation Unit, Special Search Team (SST), the Office of Emergency Management (OEM), the Departmental Firearms Unit and the Critical Incident Negotiation Team (CINT).

"The team and the scope of the work have grown exponentially," McClain said. "We are extremely busy. We are pulled in several different directions on any given day."

"I'm very, very pleased with the progress," he continued. "All teams are highly motivated. The wealth of knowledge we have now is second to none." he said. 



Heart of a Hero

Winter / Spring 2015



Senior Correction Officer's Instincts Helped Foil Bloomfield Bank Robbery

Senior Correction Officer Jerry Head of Northern State Prison seems to have a permanent smile on his face, despite having been in some unpleasant situations, such as one that took place last summer.

Head, who's been with the New Jersey Department of Corrections for 25 years, was off duty when he made a routine visit to a PNC Bank in Bloomfield, a little after 10 a.m. on June 13. He stood in line behind a tall man in a dark coat. As the man headed for the exit, Head went to the teller's booth to make a deposit. He noticed the woman looking shocked.

"I looked at her, and she was distressed," Head recalled, sensing something suspicious. "I started rolling toward the doors."

Head ran for the exit, as the bank teller yelled out that she had been robbed. The robbery suspect had quietly slid a note to her demanding money, and the man left with \$1,300.

When Head ran outside, he pulled out his off-duty gun and pointed at the back of the man, who had been walking away. Head yelled, "Stop, don't



SCO Jerry Head of Northern State Prison helped foil a bank robbery in Bloomfield last June. His actions earned him the Medal of Honor from the New Jersey Department of Corrections and a Meritorious Service Citation from the Bloomfield PBA Local 32.

move,” and Head then identified himself as a law enforcement officer. Initially hesitant, the bank robber followed Head’s orders.

“He was about to take a stride, but I beat him to it,” Head said.

Head instructed the man to put his hands over his head, drop to the ground and turn his face away from him. Head then restrained the man and told a passerby to call police. Within minutes, Bloomfield Police arrived to arrest the man, identified as Kenneth D. Grant, 47, of East Orange.

Only planning to carry out a simple chore of depositing money, Head found himself at Bloomfield police headquarters that morning. He was there to write the report on the bank robbery he helped foil. His actions lead to major recognition within the law enforcement community. The NJDOC awarded him the Medal of Honor at its annual awards ceremony last September, and the Bloomfield Policemen’s Benevolent Association, Local 32, presented him with a Meritorious Service Citation at its 44th annual dinner-dance in December. In February, he received the Medal of Valor at the Corrections USA Conference in Las Vegas.

“I was shocked,” Head said about the accolades. “I figured I was just doing my job, that it was part of my duty.”

Safety and security are top priorities for any correction officer, extending beyond the confines of a prison, according to Head. Reflecting on the incident, Head has wondered why it happened. He has been to that bank several times, and the area around it is generally considered safe.

“It’s just one of those things,” he said. “I guess it was meant to be. Fortunately, he caught a bad break, and he was at the bank at the wrong time.”

Head said local police officers were particularly impressed with his professionalism.

“They said I was so relaxed,” he said. “They were shocked that I was so calm and collected.”

Detective Capt. Glenn Wiegand of the Bloomfield Police Department praised Head’s quick response.

"He did the right thing," Wiegand said. "He took action when he needed to. It was a great job. If it wasn't for him being there, he (the suspect) may have gotten away. He was at the right place at the right time."

A statement from the Bloomfield PBA said, "Officer Head's quick thinking and intuition lead to the safe and successful apprehension of a would-be bank robber."

Head credited his experience as a correction officer with keeping him grounded, especially in dangerous situations.

"You've done it so many times, dealing with the ups and downs," he said. "You get accustomed to it through the years. You just learn it. It becomes part of your personality."

Even on his off-day, Head wasted little time reacting to the situation. It's something, he said, that must be done when every second is precious.

"It's automatic," he said. "You're thinking, 'I have to stop this.' Once I reacted, I minimized the situation.

"We have had instances where cops and correction officers have been jumped," he continued. "Every day is a dangerous situation. You can go from zero to 100."

It takes some work to always remain calm, he admitted. That's why, after completing shifts, he makes sure to have some me-time in order to "wind down" before returning home, usually by exercising at a local gym.

While he's found himself in other incidents off the clock where he's had to intervene —such as brawls and an attempted stabbing – Head said the bank robbery incident tops them all.

"Be yourself. Deal with problems accordingly. You're going to go through ups and downs," said Head, who is married and has five grown children, three daughters and two sons. "You'll become a little more safety-conscious. In the end, it's all worth it."





Helping Hand

WINTER / SPRING 2015



CRAF Supervisor Assists Driver Involved in Bizarre SUV Accident

Andrew Long had been out on March 1, enjoying himself at the Saint Patrick's Day parade in Belmar. However, when it started snowing, Long left early, hoping to reach his apartment in Ocean County before road conditions became too dangerous.

On the way home, though, Long, a classification supervisor at the Central Reception and Assignment Facility (CRAF), discovered something unusual. Traveling down the somewhat curvy Bethel Church Road in Howell, Long drove past a green Ford Explorer sport-utility vehicle with its rear tires hanging over a guardrail and the front end partially immersed in a stream.

Long pulled over to the side of the road, exited his vehicle and walked to the scene, where he started taking photographs of the hanging truck with his phone. Of the three individuals who had been in the truck, two got out of the truck safely and above ground. While the third person was able to climb out of the Explorer from the driver-side window, which had been just above the water level, he was still stranded on the creek.



Andrew Long, a classification supervisor at the Central Reception and Assignment Facility, helped save a passenger from an SUV that hung from a guardrail and was partially immersed in a stream.

Long joined others who had already gathered there to help save the man.

"At first, I was being nosy. Then I noticed a guy down there," Long recalled. "I thought, 'Oh my God, the man could drown.' I was with other good Samaritans and helped them pull the man to safety."

Long stood behind the guardrail and reached over with his right arm to help the unidentified man. When that didn't work, Long grabbed the man around his waist and pulled him over the guardrail.

At first, Long admitted he was concerned about the possibility of entering the water. "I can't even swim," he said.

Though it wasn't clear how deep the stream was, Long said the urgency of the situation compelled him to put his fears aside and concentrate on the rescue.

"At that point, I was just thinking about getting the guy out," he said. "He was obviously dazed and in a state of shock."

According to the investigation report from the Howell Police Department, the operator of the vehicle told police he was driving on the westbound lane of Bethel Church Road toward Jackson when his truck skidded on a patch of ice. That caused the truck to slide across the eastbound lane and go over a bridge guardrail, with its back tires hanging from the metal barrier.

Looking back at the accident, Long was amazed at the surreal image of the hanging truck.

"I couldn't fathom how it went over the guardrail. But I've heard SUVs tend to provide a false sense of security," Long said. "No matter what kind of vehicle you're driving, you have to be careful."

For the past 11 years, Long, 46, has worked at CRAF. He previously worked with the Commission of Investigation of the State Legislature and the agency now known as the Department of Children and Families.

Long's co-workers weren't surprised by his willingness to assist.

"Andrew is not only my supervisor at work, but he is a friend and has been since I met him 11 years ago," said Dora Fralin, a senior clerk typist at

CRAF. "We became friends in a short period of time. I know that I can call on Andrew, and he will always be willing to help if he can.

"He has come out to my church and helped with different projects when needed, whether cleaning, painting, moving things or whatever," Fralin added. "I appreciate our friendship."

Lena Garbolino, also a CRAF senior clerk typist, echoed Fralin's comments.

"He is a nice person, easy to get along with and a good employee. He always helps you and is easy to talk to," Garbolino said.

Despite the good deed, Long would like to think he didn't do anything special.

"I was at the right place at the right time," he said. "I didn't think it was heroic. I just figured if I was in a similar situation, somebody would help me, too."





WINTER / SPRING 2015



Right Place, Right Time

NJDOC Correction Officer Recruit Helps Save Woman at Fitness Center

As a new employee with the New Jersey Department of Corrections, Correction Officer Recruit Dana Orlando is still getting exposed to some of the heroic work those in her profession do to keep the public safe.

In one couple's eyes, however, Orlando herself already is viewed as a hero.

Orlando, who works at New Jersey State Prison (NJSP) in Trenton, was working out at Giant Fitness Center in Delran on St. Patrick's Day (Tuesday, March 17) when people started frantically reporting that a woman, believed to be in her 60s, had fallen while exercising on a treadmill in the upper-level fitness room. Upon hearing this, Orlando ran toward the stairs, telling a front-desk person to call 9-1-1.

Orlando didn't personally know the woman, Jennifer Jennings, 66, of Willingboro. Jennings had been lying face up, and Orlando checked her vital signs. Jennings wasn't breathing, and Orlando didn't find a pulse. The correction officer recruit started performing chest compressions, but Jennings remained unresponsive. Attempts to revive her with a defibrillator also were unsuccessful.

"She still wasn't awake or moving" by the time the ambulance arrived, Orlando recalled.



COR Dana Orlando

Jennings, who had suffered a heart attack, was transported to a nearby hospital. Fortunately, she survived.

Looking back at the incident, Orlando said she didn't think she did anything special. As Major Glynis Lewis of NJSP described it, "She appears to be one of those people who would say she was just doing what she was trained to do."

Yet, in a telephone interview, Jennings said Orlando's actions were anything but routine.

"My husband said she basically saved my life," Jennings said. "She kept me alive."

Jennings said she was placed in a medically-induced coma for six days. Afterwards, she had triple bypass surgery on March 30.

"I'm coming along," she said.

Her husband, Henry Alonzo Jennings, 70, who has communicated with Orlando since the incident, said simply, "If it weren't for her, my wife would not be here."

Henry Jennings, who is also a member of the fitness center, said that even though he didn't personally know Orlando before his wife's incident, he knew from observing her that she was someone special.

"Just the way she carried herself, and was there ready to work, she came across as a strong person," he recalled. "When I learned she was a correction officer, everything started to make sense."

Orlando distinctly remembered her first meeting with Henry Jennings.

"He came by to the gym to thank me," she said. "It was so rewarding to know she was okay."

Henry Jennings, who had been out of town for a project when his wife suffered the heart attack, said he later learned from one of Orlando's friends that she normally doesn't come to the fitness center on Tuesdays.

"I told her, 'This is why you came today,'" he said.

It was, Jennifer Jennings said, an example of "being at the right place at the right time."

"I sometimes get a little anxiety thinking, 'What if this happened if I was home or while I was driving?'" she admitted.

A retired probation officer, Jennifer Jennings said she had gone to the gym three to four times a week, mostly using the treadmill and exercise bike. She also worked on strength training. She does not expect to return to her exercise regimen at Giant Fitness for several months. She has started cardiac rehabilitation exercises, though, under the supervision of medical professionals.

Orlando, a former elementary school teacher in South Jersey, was a member of Basic Course for State Corrections, Class 231, which graduated in June 2014.

"Public safety has always been an interest," she said.

She described her new job as a wonderful opportunity and said she enjoys working with "very supportive co-workers." Orlando is becoming increasingly comfortable with the daily responsibilities of a new officer.

"It's been a learning process," she said. "You have to be mentally prepared for whatever is to come. I ask a lot of questions to make sure I understand everything there is to know. That is the key."

Major Lewis said Orlando has used her training effectively, as she demonstrated in the Jennifer Jennings incident.

"The life-saving skills that are taught in the (Correctional Staff Training) Academy are not just to save an inmate's life, but skills that can be used to save the lives of your friends and family and, in this case, a complete stranger," Lewis said. "Well done, COR Dana Orlando. We are extremely proud of you."

Delran Police Lt. John C. Williams Jr. also praised the high level of training Orlando, and correction officers in general, receive in handling emergency situations. He saw how poised she was at the fitness center.

"If it wasn't for her quick response, there could have been a much different outcome," Williams said. "It was an all-around great effort."

Henry Jennings, for one, is delighted his grandchildren still have their grandmother around, thanks to Orlando's actions.

"It's a miracle," he said.

